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October 24, 2000

CONGRESS CLEARS BENNETT'S BILL TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY IN COLORADO RIVER BASIN

Approves \$175 million for salinity control

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The U.S. House of Representatives last night approved legislation sponsored by Senator Bob Bennett (R-Utah) which will increase funding to \$175 million to improve and preserve water quality in the Colorado River Basin which supplies water to seven western basin states.

"The Colorado River is a life link in the west," said Bennett. "It provides irrigation water for more than four million acres of land in the U.S., and culinary drinking water for more than 23 million people. The health of so many, depends in large part on the river's health."

Rising salinity levels in the lower Colorado caused much concern in the 1960s and early 1970s because of damages inflicted by salt dissolved in the water in the U.S. and Mexico. The Basin States (Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming) and the federal government enacted the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act in 1974 in an effort to limit future damages. Since its passage, federal and state entities have been able to implement practices which reduce salinity levels in the Colorado River.

In 1995, Senator Bennett passed legislation authorizing the Bureau of Reclamation to implement a competitive, basin-wide approach for salinity control. The Bureau was encumbered by unnecessary bureaucratic red tape when conducting procedures used in implementing major water development projects. The Bennett legislation helped ensure that limited dollars were not wasted on unnecessary procedural requirements. Instead, it has helped streamline the process to allow the Bureau of Reclamation to contract or offer grants to local water companies and water districts in the seven basin states to conduct salt-reducing measures in the river.

Originally planned as a pilot program, Congress limited funds to a \$75 million ceiling. The Salinity Control Reauthorization Bill sponsored by Bennett this year reauthorizes the funding of the program to a level of \$175 million.

The bill will now go to the White House for presidential signature.

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